



**U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement**

# News Release

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## **FEDERAL AGENTS DISMANTLE IDENTITY THEFT RING THAT PREYED ON DINERS AT SOUTHLAND RESTAURANTS**

***Nine Indicted in Scheme that Resulted in at least \$1 Million in Losses***

LOS ANGELES - Federal authorities have arrested eight defendants accused of being part of an identity theft ring that “skimmed” account information from debit cards used by more than 100 diners at area restaurants and used the information to steal money from the victims’ bank accounts. Federal authorities today declared the ninth defendant a fugitive.

Investigators for the three agencies involved in the probe – the United States Postal Inspection Service, IRS Criminal Investigation and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement – believe the scheme resulted in the theft of more than \$1 million.

The nine defendants were indicted on June 14 by a federal grand jury in Santa Ana on charges that include conspiracy, bank fraud and money laundering. Eight of the defendants were arrested yesterday. They are:

- Kresimir Matuzovic, 28, of Brentwood;
- Nour-Eddine Messaghrou, 27, of Brentwood;
- Vanessa Goicoechea, 23, of Canoga Park;
- Toilin Kelly, 25, of West Los Angeles;
- Zhaklin Babakhanyan, 25, of Glendale;
- Kante Kangni, 25, of Inglewood;
- Juan Deleon, 25, of Newberry Park; and
- Darr Bryan, 21, of Los Angeles.

The eight defendants made their initial court appearances yesterday afternoon before a United States Magistrate Judge in Santa Ana. Defendants Kelly, Deleon and Bryan were released on bond. The other five defendants remain in custody at this time. All eight are scheduled to be arraigned on the indictment on Monday.

The ninth defendant – Yacine El Bouri, 23, of Brentwood – is a fugitive who is believed to have been in Miami, Florida recently. He is actively being sought by federal investigators.

In addition to the arrests, federal agents yesterday seized a late model Lamborghini sports car, approximately \$267,484 in cash and more than \$92,620 in Postal money orders from the residence of defendants Matuzovic and Messaghrou.

“These nine arrests should send a clear message to would-be identity thieves,” said Acting Postal Inspector in Charge Robert Malaby. “The Postal Inspection Service will not tolerate the use of the nation's mail system to perpetuate crimes of identity theft. Postal Inspectors will aggressively investigate these cases and bring the thieves to justice.”

According to the indictment, Matuzovic and Messaghrou orchestrated the scheme and instructed complicit servers at three restaurants to steal account information from patrons’ Wells Fargo Bank and Washington Mutual Bank debit cards. Matuzovic and Messaghrou allegedly provided the servers with “skimming” devices that are capable of copying the information contained on the debit cards’ magnetic strips.

Armed with the stolen account information, Matuzovic and Messaghrou allegedly would “re-strip” their own Wells Fargo and Washington Mutual debit cards with the stolen information. They would then ask the banks to provide them with new PIN numbers for their cards. After receiving the new PIN numbers, the defendants allegedly used the cards to deposit counterfeit checks into the victims’ accounts and to withdraw cash. According to the indictment, they also used the modified debit cards to purchase Postal money orders.

“IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agents will use their financial expertise to follow the ill-gotten gains of criminal enterprises such as this,” said Kenneth J. Hines, Special Agent In Charge of the IRS Criminal Investigation in Los Angeles. “Along with our law enforcement partners, such as the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, we will aggressively pursue and dismantle criminal organizations that prey on innocent victims.”

Kevin Kozak, the acting special agent in charge for ICE’s office of investigations in Los Angeles, stated: “Identity theft is a serious crime. Given the stakes and risks involved, ICE will not allow criminals or criminal networks to jeopardize our nation’s security to satisfy their own greed.”

The indictment charges all nine defendants with access device fraud, which carries a maximum possible penalty of 15 years in federal prison, and at least one count of bank fraud, which carries a maximum possible penalty of 30 years in prison.

Matuzovic and Messaghrou are each charged with four counts of mail fraud, which carries a maximum possible penalty of 20 years in prison. Matuzovic, Messaghrou, El Bouri, Goicoechea, Kelly and Babakhanyan are each charged with six counts of money laundering, which carries a maximum possible penalty of 30 years in prison. Matuzovic, Kelly and Kangni are each charged with two counts of money laundering that carry a maximum possible penalty of 10 years in prison.

During this investigation, federal agents received substantial assistance from investigators with Wells Fargo and Washington Mutual banks.